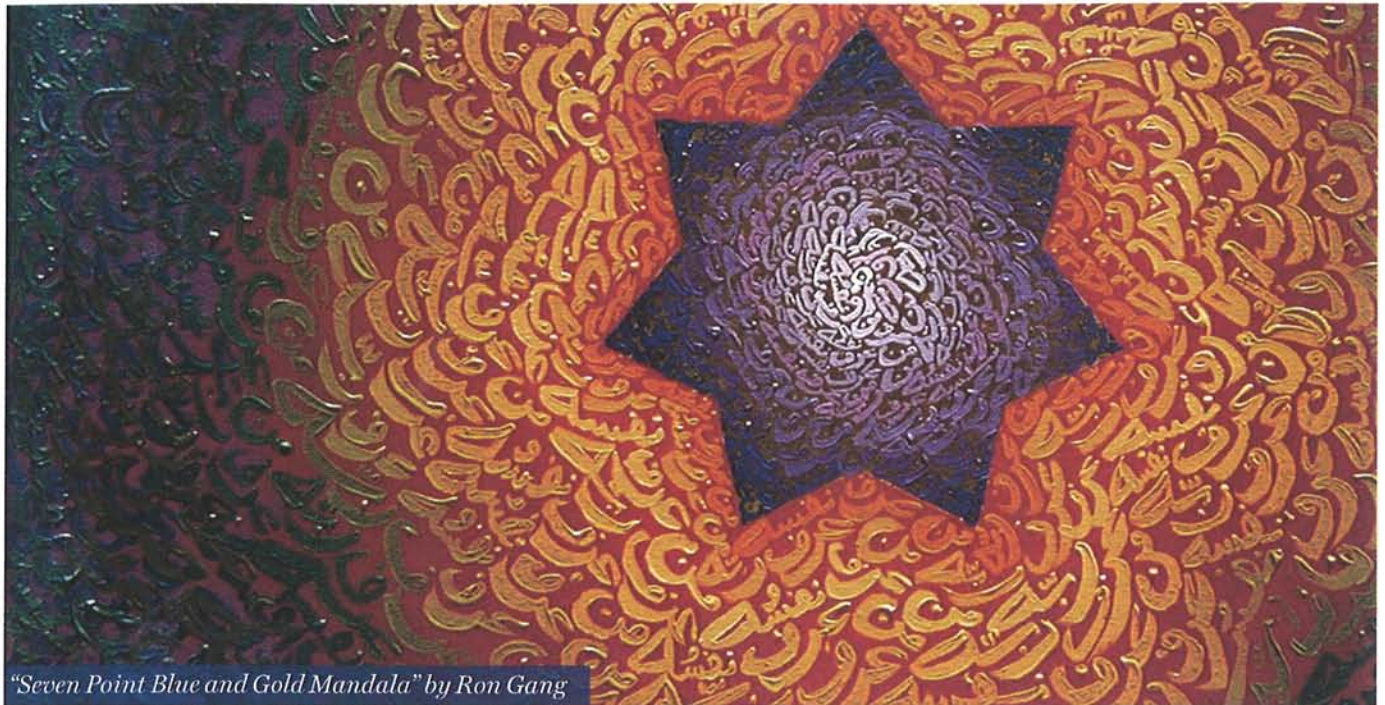




The Incompleteness in Each of Us

by Irwin Kula



"Seven Point Blue and Gold Mandala" by Ron Gang

I JUST RETURNED FROM WHAT I THINK MAY HAVE BEEN MY THIRTY-FIFTH VISIT TO ISRAEL. My wife, youngest daughter, and I spent nine days there—six nights hanging out in Tel Aviv enjoying its culture, art, and nightlife and then three days dealing with the burden, heaviness, and over-determined meaning of Jerusalem. Despite the huge difference between the sacred secularity and normalcy of Tel Aviv and the less-than-holy religiosity and abnormality of Jerusalem one question repeatedly arose: What about the *matzav* (situation) with the Palestinians? I listened to people from all walks of life and perspectives—hawks and doves, religious and secular, masorati and reformim, teenagers, middle aged, and elderly, intellectuals, taxi cab drivers, business men, waiters, rabbis, settlers and store keepers. When I returned home, (and yes I do feel at home here in New York City—as, if not more, at home than I do in Israel, though I am magically and inextricably drawn to regularly be in Israel) all that people asked me, in one way or another, was whether I thought the conflict with the Palestinians would ever end. After sixty years of independence this question casts a shadow on and swallows up almost all the amazing and inspiring accomplishments of the people of the state of Israel.

I am not sure I have anything to say that has not been said by our generals or pundits, our politicians or religious leaders, our AIPAC supporters or postmodern academics but it does seem to me that there will be no discernible movement towards resolution of the conflict (which, in all honesty, one barely feels even exists when in Tel Aviv—sort of the way the war in Iraq feels sitting in a Manhattan restaurant) until two things happen. On the one side, we Jews on the Right will need to realize that having power will

never heal the trauma of the powerlessness we feel in the face of the Shoah, and that no matter how much power we have or exercise the type of security we yearn for is never guaranteed in this world. On the other side, we Jews on the Left will need to realize that, while evil is indeed a social construction with identifiable causes that must be addressed or is indeed sometimes a projection of our own inner demons, the social construction is so complex and multi-layered or the projection becomes so hardened and real that

we do need to slay the dragon before it kills us, knowing all the while that this is no final answer but merely breathing space to address the projection before it returns. And then there is the vast majority of us Jews in the middle who feel the truth of both sides for whom the trauma is not yet personal enough to compel us to either choose one side or to reveal a new path, around which we can organize, that transcends both the fears and hopes of the Right and the hopes and fears of the Left. So we wait for what we all know is coming: more trauma that will at some point shake us out of our conventional boxes and positions that in a very strange way must provide us psychic and spiritual comfort.

Spirituality 101 teaches that the protracted nature of a conflict suggests not only that the other side will *not* go away but that it probably *should not*. This seemingly interminable conflict is not simply the result of the existence of opposing views. It isn't so much that the two parties have created the conflict as it is the conflictual relationship that has created the two parties. We Jews and we Israelis and Palestinians are in this relationship because we need each other to actually discover the incompleteness each of us is so frightened to acknowledge that at present makes it actually feel safer to live with the illusion of our completeness and the consequent violence. When the trauma is significant enough we will realize that the question isn't how we the parties can resolve the conflict but how this conflict can transform us. Then, we will each,

for different reasons that will heal us in different ways, come to learn what we desperately and so fiercely need to learn but have not yet been ready for because it requires a sort of death and rebirth and a level of mourning and grieving for how we see ourselves that will be almost as painful as the conflict itself. We will each, appropriate to our need as if standing at Sinai, learn that *we are never as powerful as our greatest fantasies and never as powerless as our worst nightmares*.

But all this seems to miss what is also true. We Jews are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of a profound and awe-inspiring human accomplishment. The establishment of a Jewish state after 2000 years of wandering, where one of the smallest tribes in the world, whose very existence is pretty miraculous, with as much freedom as any people really possesses in the twenty-first century, can wrestle with who it wants to be and choose what sort of society it wants to create in light of its 3000 year old dream of being a blessing. No matter how messy the details are today on Israel's sixtieth anniversary, this is a sacred messiness worth celebrating with extraordinary joy, great gratitude, and deep humility. ■

Rabbi Irwin Kula is the author of Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life (Hyperion, 2006), and President of CLAL—The National Jewish Center for Learning.